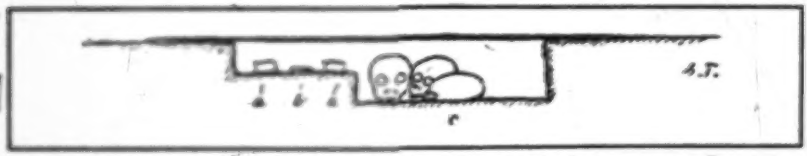

Fig. 53. Underground Chamber of a Mekuk Sorcerer, Cross-section.

(a) Circle made of plantain pieces, (b) magic medicines, (c) skulls of murdered relatives.

the Mekuk man's house companions in their sleep, so that they wake up the next day completely beaten up. They are also supposed to steal money and goods in order to take them to the Mekuk man. In short, the Mekuk stories remind one of the experiences of the man who wanted to learn to be afraid /Ed., in one of Grimm's fairy tales/.

Other medicines for wealth that utilize the power of the souls are more innocent; they do not require the murder of relatives nor care of the skulls. Instead, their powers are derived from the habitation of the souls, the Copaifera tessmannii Harms (ovɔ̌ɔ̌n). The Mekuk skulls must be included only in the event the medicine man already possesses some. The procedure as a rule is as follows. The father of the person concerned goes with a medicine man, /152/ and both clear an area under a large Copaifera. Then a leaf vessel filled with water is set up, and into this some of the bark of the Copaifera is scraped nine times (three times three); furthermore a stone from the stomach of the crocodile is placed in it if one is available. A peculiar test of the worthiness of the young man is now given. Various objects are placed together in three piles: on the first are placed steamed cassava (women's food) and a basket (ebā'dā) carried only by old women because it has a small capacity; on the second, a rifle, a bundle of vegetables (ngon) with fish, brass ornaments, cowrie shells, and a piece of cloth, all of which are things that delight young people; on the third pile is placed a fly swatter (implement of the chiefs), a foot ring made of ivory, and a boiled chicken, in other words, such things as are allotted to chiefs. Now the young man is brought to the piles. "If he has sense," he will go to the last pile and consume the chicken. In this

791 The teeth, the eye, and a piece of an evū'-besī (see Vol. II, p. 128 /Ed., not translated/) are placed in the /195/ horn, which is sealed with monitor lizard skin. Once the principal medicine has been secretly acquired in this gruesome manner, the ordination of the novice into the office of soothsayer takes place in public on the village square. The medicine man boils a chicken together with leaves of various medicine plants, especially of the [824] "medicine tree," Distemonanthus benthamianus Baill. (elī bengǎn, ejěn), and he gives the novice some of this concoction to eat ten times (1). Then the old man leaps about the village square shaking

● [801]

1. Ten is the number of wisdom, seven the lucky number, and three or nine the sacred number of the Pangwe.

the soothsayer's horn, chars a piece of the most gigantic liana of [824] the Pangwe region, Entada scandens Benth., Leguminosa (ntū' I), after he has touched it several times with his foot as he was leaping about, makes an incision in one of the novice's toes, and rubs the ashes into the wound. As he does so, he says: "If you go to war and you knock your toe against the ground so that the wound opens, the prospects for your side will be bad; otherwise they will be good" (for the liana strives upwards). The ashes of the liana, therefore, are supposed to communicate to the toe the plant's property of striving upwards and thereby help the soothsayer to rise above his fellow human beings just as the liana in its striving for light rises above the other trees. This concludes the initiation, and the novice is now a full-fledged soothsayer.

As a fee for divination, usually from one to five spears (seven to 35 pfennigs) are paid, but in times of war, when excitement, tension, and fear fill everyone with uncertainty, considerably more is paid. At such times the distrust towards soothsayers, which today is already almost universal, gives way to a willing credulity. During peaceful times the situation is pretty much as it is with us; very stupid and superstitious people, for the most part women, go to the wise man, but the great majority no longer believe in his hocus-pocus. "There are a lot of lies in it," I was told, "but once

the two opposite angles and would represent the axis of migration, mfa'a mañ, "toward the sea." The masculine direction seems to have been the place of origin of the ye (feminine?) clans, the feminine direction, that of the ésa clans. Trilles places with the latter the ébi clans, which are, geographically, from eastern clans; I wonder if they ought not rather to be connected with the ye clans since ébi means "hole," "chasm" (yee = valley, ravine). In the bilaba, masculine commodities come from the female sector, and vice versa.

These apparent contradictions would be resolved by applying the principle of double symmetry, or of sexual complementarity, similar to that which makes paternal, nonuterine half brothers called bobenyañ, "my mother's sons." This principle might be expressed somewhat as follows: every being capable of life must, in order to exist and be complete, include the opposite sex. In other words, bisexuality, a universal vital principle, should be found in every part of the universe /création/. Stoll finds proof of this in the language, where the tone levels in his view constitute genuine differentiation by grammatical sex genders, and especially in the rites whose purpose appears to be not to make men entirely masculine or women entirely feminine, but rather to give to each sex the necessary complement of the opposite sex.

Whatever may be thought of this theory, it is a fact that, because of the apparent or real absence of grammatical sex gender in the language, the majority of the early writers, even Trilles, did not attach enough importance to real gender, to the sex actually attributed to objects, particularly to magical and ritual materials. We know that spear, akoñ, saber, fa, and probably the large drum, mbaé, are male; calabashes and cooking pots, rattles (mengoñ), the double bell (nkeñ) are female; the drum-telephone, nkul, is androgynous; horns for medicaments, minlak, are male at the pointed end, female at the hollow end, and the same with the rifle. As to numbers, my conclusions are diametrically opposed to those of Stoll, who believes even numbers to be male, and odd, female, though admittedly he advances as proof the large part played by odd numbers in feminine rites, which runs directly counter to his theory of double symmetry.

The numerical system is in any event only imperfectly known. Counting is based on 10, with traces of an 8:10, (awôm), basis /116/ and of 8, mwom, /having?/ perhaps the same root as different classifiers. The so number is 9. Nyin, 4, seems related to a YI

radical with feminine connotations (yi = to wish, also meaning "to need," "to cry"; it conveys an idea of "desiring," in contrast to kɔ̂mbɔ̂, related to kɔ̂m = to arrange, put in order, do properly, and bo = to do, make, conveying an idea of "will"; the passive form of yi, yian, means both "duty" and "to be well," "to suit"). Much research needs to be done while there is still time.

d. Sorcery, Possession

Malignant sorcery, ngbwel, is generally attributed to a sorcerer, nnem (plur: beyem, cf. yem = to know, to dream), being possessed by a malevolent being, an évu (Fang, évur, évus). The évu is not an immaterial spirit but a living being, an animal like a crab or centipede, and lodging in the internal organs of the nnem. At an autopsy it is often found in the form of a polyp or tumor, a fibroid tumor in women. It may even happen that the nnem's body does not show such an indication, because the évu has escaped, but there will be some traces of it, fluids, distention of the stomach, colon, or gall bladder. In such cases, as has been said, the corpse is not buried in the usual manner but is burned, thrown into a river, or buried at a crossroads far from the village, in order to prevent the nnem's kɔ̂n from returning to haunt relatives and neighbors.

The possessed person may be unaware of the possession, but he is held no less responsible for the harm caused by the évu. The latter goes out at night while the nnem is asleep and feeds on the blood, metyi, hence strength, tyi of its victims, who fall ill, grow weak and die, or it eats their niem (heart and lungs), which brings on madness or mental decay and often death, too. The évu also feeds on eggs, on metyi /sic/, and on milk, preferably women's milk (menyañ, from nyañ = to give the breast, cf. -nyañ = mother, in compound words), food which village people will not touch. When the évu has trouble in getting food, it may turn against the nnem and kill it for nourishment or, if the nnem is a woman, it may attack the children in her womb. Aside from these occasions, ngbwel is an advantage to the nnem, even when it is unconscious; he benefits from the strength accumulated by the évu during its nocturnal hunts; furthermore, the évu assists him, brings a sort of luck to his undertakings, which is natural, since the évu gains from the nnem's intermediation. This kind of luck, asɛ́ɛ́ (from a verb, sɛ́ɛ́, with like meaning: a ngɔ sɛ́ɛ́